THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS

BENGALURU • SUNDAY • FEBRUARY 20, 2022 • ₹12.00 • PAGES 28 • LATE CITY EDITION

Ajinkya Rahane

Cheteshwar Pujara

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ROHIT NEW TEST CAPTAIN, RAHANE, PUJARA DROPPED

Squad officially enters transition era as team for two-match home series against Sri Lanka sees multitude of changes

ONE LEADER FOR ALL FORMATS, AGAIN

The biggest news centres around Rohit Sharma. The 34-year-old is now the skipper in all three formats, a gamble considering the opener has had recent fitness issues. Selection committee, keeping in mind Covid bubbles, have rested the likes of Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant for the T20I series against Sri Lanka. Ishant Sharma and Wriddhiman Saha also out | P15

'PLAY RANJI AND PROVE YOUR WORTH'

- The door is not shut on the duo of Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara and others like Hardik Pandya. The message to them is 'go and shine in the Ranji Trophy' to be considered for selection
- Spinner Saurabh Kumar has earned a maiden call-up. Both Ravindra Jadeja and Shubman Gill are back in the Test team

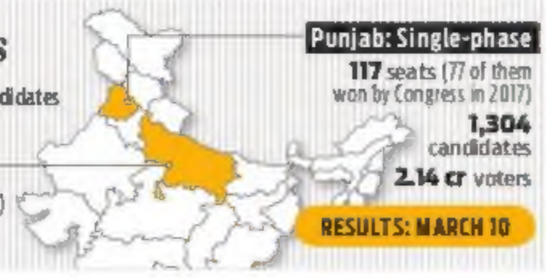
100

KOHLI IS IN LINE TO PLAY HIS 100TH TEST AT MOHALI

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Big battle in two states

Close to 4.3 crore people are eligible to vote as 1,931 candidates fight it out for 176 seats in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh


Punjab: Single-phase
117 seats (77 of them won by Congress in 2017)
1,304 candidates
2.14 cr voters
RESULTS: MARCH 10
Uttar Pradesh: Phase III
59 seats (49 of them won by BJP in 2017)
627 candidates | 2.15 cr voters

Caste arithmetic at play as Uttar Pradesh to hold third phase of voting

After intense canvassing, Punjab set for polls today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Chandigarh/Lucknow

AFTER a high-decibel campaign that saw barbs being traded, wild accusations being levelled and political heavyweights descending on the state to woo voters staring at a multi-cornered fight, all 117 Assembly seats in Punjab will go to polls on Sunday, while the fate of candidates in 59 seats in Uttar Pradesh will be sealed in the third phase.

Punjab election this time has turned out to be a bit complex with major parties deciding to go alone, giving multiple choices to the electorate. The fight is among the ruling party Congress, the Aam Aadmi Party, the Shiromani Akali Dal-Bahujan Samajwadi Party alliance, the BJP-PLC-SAD (Sanyukt) and the Sanyukt Samaj Morcha, a political front of various farmer bodies. While the Congress is trying hard to retain power, it is mired in leadership controversies and the tussle between the chief of Punjab Congress unit Navjot Singh Sidhu and chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi. Some political observers consider the AAP to be the front-runner but the BJP and SAD are also putting up a tough fight.

Polling in Punjab will be held from 8 am to 6 pm. Over 2 crore voters will exercise their franchise. Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab S Karuna Raju said arrangements have been made to ensure peaceful, free and fair elections. He said that of total 1,304 candidates, 231 are from national parties, 250 from state parties, 362 from unrecognised parties, while 461 are independent candidates. As many as 315 candidates have criminal antecedents.

In UP, as the stage is set for polling in across 16 districts mainly covering the Yadav belt, the focus is back on the traditional caste cauldron of the state. As many as 627 candidates are in the fray, of which 97 are women. Samajwadi Party was decimated in the Yadav belt with just eight seats under the sweeping Modi wave in 2017. While the BSP and Congress had won one seat each.

The polling will take place between 7 am and 6 pm, according to the election authorities. The counting for both Punjab and UP will be on March 10. P9

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 2022 DECIDE

Case against Kejriwal over 'traitor' jibe

The chief electoral officer of Punjab on Saturday directed the police to register an FIR against AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal, after a complaint by the Shiromani Akali Dal over a video clip in which the Delhi CM allegedly called his opponents "traitors"

UP: 90K para forces being deployed

Around 90,000 troops of Central Armed Police Forces are being deployed for the third, fourth and fifth phases of polling in UP scheduled to be held on Feb 20, 23 and 27 respectively, according to Union home ministry sources

Hijab row spreads to rural Gadag, peace meet in B'luru

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Gadag, Bengaluru

THE hijab row that started with six students protesting at a government college in Udupi has spread across the state and vitiated the atmosphere even in rural hinterlands. Gadag district, which was known for communal harmony till recently, too has not been spared.

Protests that were limited to Gadag town have spread to Naragund, Gajendragad and Laxmeshwar.

As the controversy continues to rage, a new initiative for Hindu-Muslim unity was taken up in Bengaluru on Saturday under the leadership of Muruga Mutt pontiff Shivamurthi Muruga Swamiji, who is known for his progressive stand on several issues. Moulana Maqsood Imran, chief priest at the Jamia Masjid in Bengaluru, Jagadguru Basavamurthy Madara Chennaiah Swamiji of Madara Chennaiah Mutt and a host of other Hindu and Muslim religious leaders held hands in a show of unity.

The Moulana said, "The government order of February 5, asking students to stick to uniforms and not to wear garbs of any religious identify inside classrooms, should be withdrawn. The issue is now before the Karnataka High Court and also, the order has created a lot of confusion."

Shivamurthi Muruga Swamiji said, "The hijab row is man made and without blaming anyone, we should strive for peace. As wise citizens, we need to work out a formula for peace." P4

Muruga Mutt pontiff Shivamurthi Muruga Swamiji and other religious heads at a meeting in Bengaluru on Saturday | VINOD KUMAR T

EXPRESS READ

2 jawans martyred in J&K

Srinagar: Two Army personnel were killed in an encounter with LeT terrorists in a village in Shopian district on Saturday. A terrorist was also killed. It is the first encounter in Jammu and Kashmir this year in which Army personnel have lost lives. P10

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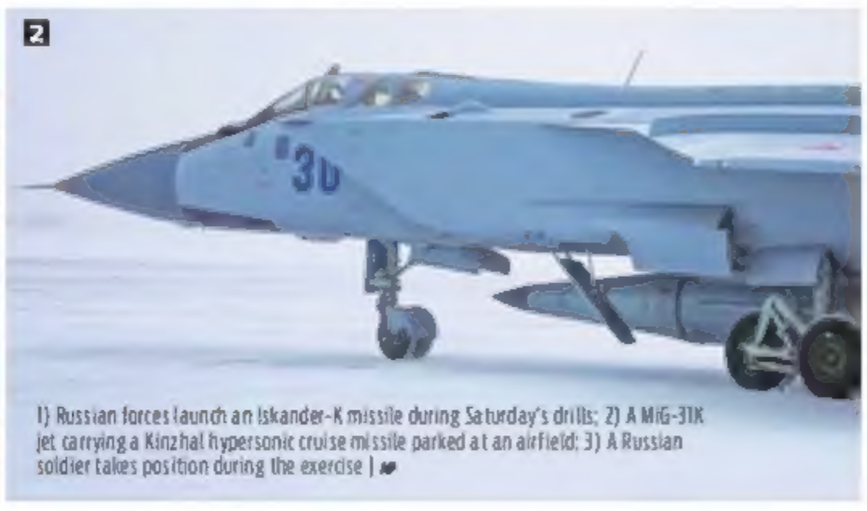
Deltacron

NO CASE IN INDIA YET

... another Covid variant and another wave in the horizon? Even as the world is recovering from the third wave, the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium has sent out an alert that Deltacron cases have been traced in the UK, US and Oz. Deltacron has properties of Delta and Omicron. P3



1) Russian forces launch an Iskander-K missile during Saturday's drills; 2) A MiG-31K jet carrying a Kinzhal hypersonic cruise missile parked at an airfield; 3) A Russian soldier takes position during the exercise | AP

Tensions rise as Russia holds nuclear drills

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

HOURS after US president Joe Biden said he is fully convinced that Russian president Vladimir Putin will give orders to invade Ukraine soon, Russia on Saturday conducted massive war drills near the east European country's border.

The drills involved use of multiple nuclear-capable weapons, including the newly-developed hypersonic missiles. Putin personally oversaw the exercises from the Kremlin situation room. "As of this moment I'm convinced he (Putin) has made the decision," Biden said citing US intelligence.

Meanwhile, Washington rubbished Moscow's claim that it withdrew troops from Ukraine's border.

The US believes close to 1,50,000 Russian forces are still there. A Pentagon official said while 40-50% of Russian forces deployed along the Ukrainian border have moved back from vantage points, they are still in attack positions. They believe Russia will use the long-simmering separatist conflict in east Ukraine as a pretext to launch an invasion. P12

Separatists gear up

Raising fears of more violence, pro-Russia separatists in Ukraine said they have begun a full military mobilisation

Juice of kindness: Dharwad man's way of paying back

MALLIKARJUN HIREMATH
@Dharwad

QUENCHING the thirst of visually challenged people and offering them juice free of cost is this juice shop owner's small and well-intended gesture to give back to society.

Krishna Nayak, who runs his juice centre on University Road in Kalyan Nagar of Dharwad, says he was inspired by visually challenged Hindustani and Carnatic vocalist, late Puttaraj Gawai. A proponent of Gwalior Gharana, Gawai had set up a theatre company to raise funds to provide free food, shelter and education to differently abled orphans.

Krishna Nayak

Krishna Nayak, a master degree holder in physical education, elaborates philosophically, "Everyone wants to earn money, but it is necessary to pay back to society too. People should render service according to their abilities without expecting any returns or rewards."

He says, "I announced the free service for the visually challenged persons considering their financial condition. But of nearly 15 such people who visited my juice centre, many paid saying they have government jobs."

However, many criticised him when he started this service, asking how he would identify visually challenged people. "But my intentions are good and I may be losing just 5 per cent of my profit," he added.

Puttanna Kanagal, the icon, to get memorial

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @Bengaluru

NEARLY four decades after the death of iconic Kannada filmmaker Puttanna Kanagal, the Chalanachitra Academy is proposing to the State Government to convert his ancestral house at Kanagal village in Periyapatna taluk of Mysuru district into a museum and a library. Once this century-old, dilapidated structure is rebuilt, it will be a tourist attraction and a study centre for cinema enthusiasts, stated members of the Karnataka Chalanachitra Academy, which is pushing for the project with the government.

Puttanna Kanagal, who gave some of the most enduring classics and iconic movies of Indian cinema, had worked in many languages, including Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi. His Gejje Pooje and Sharapanjara won three national awards, while he was honoured with a number of state awards. Some of the stars of Kannada cinema, including Vishnuvardhan, Ambareesh, Kalpana, Arathi and more, owed their careers to him. P4

TAKE YOUR SHOT	NATIONWIDE	FEB 19	FEB 19	KARNATAKA	FEB 19	FEB 18
Feb 19: 32,92,516 doses	Fresh cases	25,920	32,270	Fresh cases	1,313	1,137
Feb 18: 27,47,924 doses	Recoveries	66,754	60,298	Recoveries	4,890	3,870
	Deaths	492	325	Deaths	19	20